

## **Review of Children of the Bird Goddess**

Children of the Bird Goddess is a book that will rightfully earn a lasting place in the literature of the Macedonian people. While there will always be a place for carefully and thoroughly researched documentary works, village and family histories, and, of course, more comprehensive histories such as Toronto Macedonian community activist Risto Stefov's recent History of the Macedonian People, works that mainly inform our intellect, we also need works that aim directly at the heart and soul. Children of the Bird Goddess is such a book. Kita Sapurma's recounting of stories from her life in Aegean Macedonia and exile in Australia, and those of her grandmother, mother and daughters, is rendered into a lyrical and beautiful English by her daughter Pandora Petrovska, who fills out the story with her own understanding as an Australian with an acute awareness of her Macedonian identity.

While it was important to Pandora to provide a voice to those whose voices have been historically stifled, Aegean Macedonians, and particularly the women of that society, she tries to provide readers with a window into the rich world of these women, whose lives were lived in close connection to their mother earth. Her rendering of their stories does not romanticize their lives, it dignifies them. It honors their knowledge of practical things that allow for food, shelter and clothing from their own land and labor with little or no dependence on foreign industrial manufactures. She also honors their strength and their courage and endurance as they struggle to hold their families together, provide for their needs, and resist the cruelty and prejudice of the Greek invaders and occupiers of their homeland.

If your heart has ever been moved by the sight of some vulnerable child ganged up on and made to feel worthless by the cruelty and ignorance of schoolyard bullies (all of my fellow teachers know this experience all too well), then you have some small hint of the fate of the Aegean Macedonian village people who have since 1913 endured the loss of their identity, their land, their history and even the evidence of that history in old churches, tombs and place names. The process has been one of swift and brutal repression when Macedonians have physically resisted, but it has also been a process of slow, continual harassment and humiliation through denial of opportunity to freely and openly be Macedonians right up to the present day.

However, there is one thing that bullies everywhere, Greek racists included, cannot endure. That is public exposure of their misdeeds. Just as no one could have foreseen the particular power of one elderly black woman named Rosa Parks, who merely refused to yield her seat to

a white man on a bus in the American racist South and sparked a national civil rights movement, no one can know the long-term effect of books such as Kita Sapurma and Pandora Petrovska's on the conscience and consciousness of the world, and most particularly those in the Balkans who would rather not know anything about the lives of those they have injured.

Despite all of their efforts to crush the spirits and erase all traces of such people from the face of the earth, the children of the bird goddess endure and are finding their voices. Although many were killed and far too many were bullied out of their identities, others such as Kita and Pandora were not. Pandora has connected her mother's Macedonian folk tales of Silyan the Stork and other myths, legends and customs to an even older tradition of ancient earth religions and goddesses, including the bird goddess from which the book takes its name, that never fully disappeared from collective memory over thousands of years of Macedonian village life. Astute observers of Macedonian language and culture, such as linguist Odyssey Belchevsky, are today demonstrating how so much of that rich history and lore is buried in plain sight within the words of the Macedonian language.

Children of the Bird Goddess by Kita Sapurma and Pandora Petrovska is available to readers through the book section of the Macedonian History Canada website. An Australian Pollitecon Press publication, 168 pages, cost \$29 Can. (well worth it) through the website.